

YOU CAN HAVE A BETTER MEMORY





by Muriel Lederer

IN CORAL GABLES, Florida, recently, a 63 year old woman stepped into the path of a railroad freight train. She was killed, but the man with her leaped aside unharmed. Later he said that they were returning home to pick up the woman's eyeglasses . . . she had forgotten them at home.

One evening my husband stepped off the bus from the city and walked home briskly. We had dinner and afterwards he retreated to the living room to catch up on some office work. But, alas, his briefcase was nowhere in the house. We looked everywhere, then he remembered . . . he'd left it on the bus!

We phoned the bus line that serves our suburban community. "I'm sure I left my briefcase in the third

A Help-Your-Self Booklet

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seat of the 6:01," my husband told the Lost and Found Department. "If you left it, you can pick it up tomorrow at the Department's office in the main terminal," said the man on the other end. "The driver makes regular trips through the bus picking up all the articles left behind. He turns them in after the day's run. You should see all the stuff we get in here after one day's run!" he said.

Not long ago newspapers across the country carried the story of a suitcase containing \$100,000 worth of jewels reported stolen from movie-making Albert Warner. The suitcase was later found right where the movie magnate left it, in a closet of his hotel room.

There is a lady named Fanny Crespi in Madonna Del Sasso, Italy, who has earned the name "Forgetful Fanny." She was elected mayor of the town, but forgot to take her oath of office in the prescribed thirty days. So, her fellow citizens had to vote her in again. Elected the second time, Fanny rushed off to take her oath.

Reliable Memory an Asset to Success

HAVING A RELIABLE memory is like having a good friend with you 24 hours a day. Do you realize that a dependable memory is a valuable personal asset, one worth treating with respect and indulgence? Your efficiency and chances of getting ahead in life will be improved if you train your memory. A better memory helps develop your personality and intelligence. Successful people are often characterized by their good memories. "Memory is the mother of wisdom," said the wise Greek playwright, Aeschylus. Aristotle, too, believed a good memory improved a man's competence. Napoleon, Lincoln and Churchill, to name a few, all are renowned for their fabulous memories.

One of the last century's fine writers said, "God gave His children memory that in life's garden there might be June roses in December." A seventeenth century wit said, "Liars ought to have good memories."

To have a reservoir of memories that you can fall back on in times of stress or despair is vital in the balancing of your personality. A knowledge and memory of the past can often instill faith in the future when things look grim. You can take courage from the fact that things have worked out well for you in the past (your memory tells you so), and solace will come as you "remember" events from your past.

Suppose you live in an area where swollen rivers and floods are an annual problem and hazard. Should your home be threatened or even damaged by the angry waters, things will seem pretty bad. You look around and feel the depths of discouragement and despair. But take heart and courage from the *memory* that such things have happened in your town before,

and somehow the crisis passed, people patched up the damage, and life returned to normal. In cases like this, your memory will serve you well if you allow it to help.

Whether you are interested in making friends or making a sale, it's wise to note Dale Carnegie's famous advice. "The sweetest music in the world to another person is the sound of his own name." The average person is more interested in hearing his own name than he is in all the other names on earth put together, Mr. Carnegie said, in emphasizing how important it is to remember the names of people you meet.



Reasons Behind Memory Lapses

ARE YOU ONE of those people who worry occasionally about memory lapses? You may start introducing a friend, but suddenly can't remember his name. You tell about something you heard, then can't recall who told you. You have to make a speech, and you stay up all night because you're afraid you'll forget what you plan to say.

Or are you one of those people who are forgetful in an absent-minded way? There was a great British

missionary who was forever receiving all his belongings through the mail—shoes, Bible, toothbrush all followed him home in an unending stream. There is even a story that one day he met a friend on the street and put down his bag to make a note in his diary. Then he went blithely off . . . minus the bag.

Actually, what is memory? Can you control it? Can you improve it? Is it like a filing cabinet with only a limited capacity? Will you become more forgetful as you get older?

In reality your memory is elastic—the more you take in, the more you seem to have room for.

One memory expert has said that memory is preserved in some ingenious way that still eludes us. It is tough and deep-rooted, only death can eliminate it completely. This man compares the storehouses of information recorded in our brains to great libraries whose shelves are tightly filled with neatly arranged books, carefully catalogued and ready for use.

It is estimated that your mind can store 600 memories a second for a lifetime of 75 years without feeling any strain. You are born with the equipment, but perhaps you aren't using it at full capacity. Memory is like reading or writing. We can all do it after a fashion, but a little training helps do it better and faster. So, learn to use your memory by putting that facility to work for you.

"Good memory impresses others," says Dr. Henry B. Loess, psychologist at Lake Forest College, Lake Forest, Illinois. "People differ in basic memory capacity, but most of us can do something to improve our memory. Many of us don't do enough!"

Why do we seem to have excellent memories for some things, but not others? I called my sister-in-law

three times in one week to ask about borrowing card tables and chairs and other items for a party and each time forgot to request a chafing dish. A shopper may forget her umbrella on the homebound bus, but she can tell you the exact price of dozens of items she saw in the stores. A bookkeeper may forget his wife's birthday, but the dates on entires in his immaculate set of books are all correct.

Why do we forget? Dr. Loess says that there may be interference of material between the time we think we've learned something and the time we try to recall it. For example, if you are studying French and German at the same time, you'll have trouble keeping the grammar rules straight because the material is so similar and interferes with itself.

Your unconscious motives will also direct you to remember or forget certain things. Psychologists say that you remember only those things which interest you and forget those things which don't attract your attention. You also tend to forget those events which fulfill no plan or even detract from your plans. If you make a doctor's appointment, you may forget all about



going on the appointed day. The reason may be that there is interference from too many other things on your mind; or that you tend to remember those things that are most important and to forget those that you care least about; or that unconsciously you are really afraid to see the doctor.

Mrs. Tom Green asked her husband to mail a letter on the way to his job as a grinder in the chipping room of a foundry. Tom got all the way inside the plant before he remembered the letter. His memory didn't fail him on the job, however. He carefully remembered to tighten a safety nut after changing an abrasive wheel. Psychologists would say that his job interested him, and so he remembered each step, but mailing his wife's letter slipped his mind because he wasn't interested in the letter, or its contents.

Five Ways to Improve Your Memory

WE ARE ALL born with the ability to remember. Sadly enough it is the mental function we pay least attention to. It is the one function we can do the most about. You don't need a system or gimmick or device to improve your memory. But you do need to know what is meant by remembering and forgetting.

To improve your memory, you should become more aware of the factors that influence a good memory, says Dr. Loess. Elaborate memory-building devices aren't necessary if you understand these factors and put them to work. You'll sometimes find a memory-building device effective because you are actually using the five guiding principles which will be explained later on.

Learning to remember is like learning to play

tennis. Both are specific skills which you can master. A poor memory is actually no reflection on your intelligence. You could be an Einstein and not remember your address; or you could be the town idiot and have a fantastic memory. If you like people, names and faces will be easier to remember. If you're a housewife, think how easy and handy it would be to know the family's favorite recipes by heart. If you're a foreman, wouldn't it be helpful to remember more about each of your men than just his name? Is he married? Wife's name? Children? Own his own home? Where?

You don't need a memory-training expert to set up a system for you. You know your own mental habits and your peculiar needs better than anyone. Let these five guide rules as suggested by Dr. Loess become your guide to improving your memory of those things which are most important to you.



1. Be Interested.

It's easy to remember the things that have meaning and are important to you. If you are truly interested in improving your memory, nonsense memory-building devices (called mnemonic devices) seem to work because time and effort are spent while you practice the

device. If you are an employee learning to operate a punchpress in a factory, you have to remember the steps outlined by your training supervisor. If you find the job satisfying, remembering them is no problem because your interest in the work makes memory easy. If you find the job dull, try forcing yourself to be more interested in the product you are turning out or your part in the production of something very helpful to many people. You'll find yourself remembering a lot more.

In general an isolated fact, idea, face or name will drop out of your mind quickly. You can relate it to what you already know if you want to remember it. The power of association is the key. Be alert enough to hang new facts on mental hooks by means of association. The idea is then ready when you want to draw it out to use again.



2. Learn by Repetition.

Practice recalling the thing you want to remember. You should occasionally recall the information you're

trying to remember just to be sure it's still there. If you ever have to memorize anything such as a part in a play or ceremony, a speech or a presentation, the best time to do it is in the evening about a week ahead of time and just before bedtime. You'll remember it 30 per cent more effectively. Sleep gives your memory impressions hours of time to crystallize and "settle"—undisturbed by new unrelated thoughts and experiences. Then try reciting your part every day or so before the big day to cement the words in your mind.

Betty McCall, a secretary to a sales manager, took letters to be sent to the same group of salesmen every week. After a while Betty decided she could save a great deal of time if she remembered the full name and address of each man. She concentrated on learning a few each week and very soon found she could speed up her job considerably because she no longer had to stop and look up each name and address.

The reverse is true when something happens that you want to forget. Busy yourself as quickly and completely as you can in a variety of activities so that the fresh experiences will blur the more painful ones.

If you happen to see a bad accident with serious casualties on your way to work, you will want to get the incident out of your mind as fast as you can. Throw yourself into your job, giving careful attention to the minutest details and by the end of the day, the variety of fresh activities may help to blur the more painful memories of the upsetting encounter.

If someone should offend or slight you, you'll be a happier person if you *intend* to forget the hurt. Work hard at putting the incident out of your mind rather than dwelling on it and before long you will have forgotten the whole thing.

3. Spread Out Your Practice.

Work at your memorizing during short periods because the unlearned part of your material will interfere with what's already been learned. Hurried learning isn't effective. Don't cram! Cramming seems to work for some of us some of the time because we are suddenly motivated and interested in learning. But cramming isn't effective over the long pull because of interference with other material you have in your mind. Material must be digested over a period of time to become thoroughly understood and a part of you. The more you are trying to commit to memory, the less effective cramming is.

A salesman in a new job trying to learn prices and style numbers and facts about his product would do better to digest everything slowly over a period of time rather than trying to learn the whole mass at once. The more material there is, the harder it is to learn and the harder it is to retain. The salesman should sit down in a quiet spot with a few sheets at a time. If he works at something entirely different before and after such study, there won't be any interference of what he already knows with what he's trying to learn.

A stenographer who is unsure of herself when it comes to punctuation would do better trying to learn a few rules and examples at a time rather than trying to cram all about where and how to punctuate at once.

Because there are so many types of punctuation marks used for such a variety of purposes, the stenographer will remember more if she divides the material into "lessons" and concentrates on a given "lesson" for a short time. "Lesson" time should be sandwiched between two entirely different activities if she wants to retain most of what she's trying to learn.

4. Know What It Is You Want to Remember.

Don't try to remember everything . . . nobody can! Decide what is most useful to you in your working or home life and become genuinely interested in developing your memory along those lines. A supervisor would do well learning to quickly recognize the names and faces of his new employees. This would be very valuable when he must face new groups every so often.

A truly good memory means that you can distinguish between what is worth remembering and what



is not. You can remember too much as well as too little. Pick out the essentials. If you are trying to remember a person you've just met, look at him and pick out the characteristics that make him an individual. Try to commit those few important things about him to memory.

Being able to sort out what is important to remember and what you can forget without loss helps improve your memory because the superfluous "extras" are cleared away, leaving only those facts you will need

to know in the future. If you have a new job, chances are the first few days you'll be meeting dozens of new people with whom you'll be working. Why not start out trying to remember the names of those with whom you'll be working the closest, adding more names as you master the first group.

If you are asked to join a committee or group of some sort and don't know too many people, start by getting to know the men sitting on either side of you at the first meeting you attend. Make an effort to remember their names and at every meeting try to add a few more names to your "repertoire."



5. No Memory Device Or Aid Is a Crutch.

Nothing can take the place of your interest. It's up to you! Your interest is the force which moves facts into either a permanent spot in your memory or into oblivion.

Suppose you are assigned a new job. Of course, you'll want to master it as quickly as possible. Be con-

fident that you can become, for example, a skilled machine operator. Intend to remember the instructions you've had. Be attentive when the foreman is explaining that you must stop the turning action at exactly the right moment. Try to understand clearly why even though the expensive machine is precision itself, there is a difference between a tolerance of $\frac{1}{32}$ and .001 and just coming close isn't good enough. Not knowing the right way to handle the machine may send a hundred dollar piece of metal to the scrap heap and back up a whole production line for want of parts.

Learn as much as you can about the job you are trying to master. The modern machine, be it a giant punch press, an automatic screw machine, or a computer, can perform marvels, but it is dependent upon your skilled hands and brains to keep it maintained and adjusted. It'll be easier to remember your specific job if you can fully understand the "what" and "why" of what you are doing. Then try to visualize how your steps fit into the production line as a whole. Try to think of the pleasant results the completed job will accomplish, a new car rolling onto a showroom floor, a household appliance ready for delivery, or a perfect letter off to an important customer.

Fasten the steps of your new job in your mind by repeating them often—doing this at regular intervals, rather than trying to cram them in at one time. Test yourself by reciting the steps to yourself while trying to visualize the procedure. Your genuine interest in mastering the job will be your memory's biggest helper.

But here's a word of warning: don't be like Ned Brown who was making a project of trying to improve his memory. He ran into a man on the street whose name escaped him. "Don't tell me. I'll remember in

a minute," Ned said. "Let me see, do I know you from school?"

"No."

"Lodge?"

"No."

"Work?"

"No. Listen silly, I'm your brother John and mother wants to know why haven't you been to see her lately?"

Ned had been concentrating so hard he lost proportion and common sense.

Memory, like friendship, strengthens as you lay burdens upon it, and becomes trustworthy as you trust it. It's up to you to see that your memory becomes your most dependable friend.